

The English Leaflet

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JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE

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Literature in the Junior High School is, I am aware, a large subject, one upon which volumes might be written, and, consequently, one which can here be treated only superficially. I shall, therefore, confine my discussion to certain phases of the subject; namely, the importance of the work in literature, the choice of material, and some suggestions for conducting the work.

It is unbelievable, yet appallingly true, that among many people, even among teachers, yes, even among teachers of English, there are those to whom literature is still one of the extra curricula activities, to be indulged in as a pleasant pastime after the children have mastered the three R's—which is never. These people fail to realize that, once the mechanics of reading is learned, the child will get just as much *practice* in reading a masterpiece as in reading a *Conversation between a Pin and a Needle*, *Kate and the Goat*, or any of the moral treatises so popular in school-readers, while *interest* and *inspiration* have never yet been known to interfere with a child's pronunciation or articulation.

We must admit, if we face the question honestly, that reading is a popular recreation, not only of those who have the advantages of higher education, but also of those who must take their enjoyment from this source slowly, painstakingly, and with but partial understanding of what they read. What are the literary tastes of these people? It is not necessary to gather statistics from libraries or from publishers. Step into a circulating library, look over the assortment of books, and watch the selection of the patrons for ten or fifteen minutes; look around the street car at the newspaper serials, magazines, and books that are refreshing the minds of the tired working people. You will not find much that could be called litera-

ture. Doesn't the blame lie, partly, with us for failing to make our work in literature more vital and far reaching?

As a source of enjoyment and information, as a means of broadening our outlook on life and of deepening our sympathies, as a spur to our perception and clear thinking, and as a means of "creating ideals that shall mould the spiritual nature," literature cannot be surpassed by any subject in the curriculum. History may perform one of these services, geography and economics another, mathematics and science another; but in the hands of a skillful teacher, literature will do all these and more. It must, however, be *literature*, and it must be literature of wide scope and of sufficient variety to make an appeal to every individual in the class.

How then, shall we select our program for pupils of the Junior High School? Our success depends, it seems to me, upon four conditions: our knowledge of literature, our understanding of children, our earnestness and enthusiasm in our work, and our ability for indefatigable labor.

A great measure of failure in teaching literature is due to the fact that teachers do not know the subject. I heard one teacher of English say that she never read a book except when she was obliged to. Another chose *Riding Down Hill on a Bicycle* as a humorous poem "because the title sounded comical."

Much of the best literature is for all ages; this is especially true of poetry. In presenting it to children, however, we must consider their ability to cope with structure and vocabulary as well as to comprehend the situation. In poetry it is often permissible to study a poem with a class, knowing all the while that some subtleties of meaning are beyond their grasp. The music, rhythm, pictures, and some of the thought will appeal to them, and if they memorize such a selection, it will be a source of never ending joy to them. "The splendor falls on castle walls" is an example of this kind of poem. We might study it in a sixth grade or in a college section, and while the second group might understand it better, I doubt if they would enjoy it more than one of my sixth grades did.

In selecting the material for our course in literature we should subject each selection to the following tests:

I. *Does it appeal to children's interests?*

As I have studied them, the children like anything that centers about:

A. Human interest.

1. Child life.

Similar to their own experience.

Unlike their own experience.

2. Adult life.

This interest is shown:—in the frequent reference to, "When I grow up," and, "My father does——," in younger children; in the imitation of older people in both young and older children; and in the desire of pupils of Junior High School age to associate with upper class pupils or adults.

B. Heroism and adventure.

C. Nature and animals.

D. The marvelous as depicted in fairy tales and later in myths and legends.

II. *Does it present high literary standards?*

The only difference between "Treasure Island" and "The Gold Bug" and much of the yellow-covered trash that our boys surreptitiously read, is that the first two have literary merit and the others lack it. Fortunately, this great difference is, at first, so slight in the eyes of the fourteen or fifteen year old boy that he will never suspect us of trying to reform him when we say casually, "Do you like that book?" "Why?" "Then you will enjoy one I have at home. I know boys who have read it at one sitting." When the reader returns "Treasure Island," he will probably remark, "Gee, I never knew teachers had books like that. Gut any more?" And we refrain from commenting upon the "Gee" and "gut"—until some future language period.

III. *Is it satisfactory from a moral standpoint?*

This does not mean anything so obvious and inartistic as the pointed moral, nor so enervating as the sugar-coated kind, but it does mean that the stories and poems should help to establish a wholesome attitude of mind, and develop interest in things that are worth while. A bit of nonsense that makes for cheerfulness and helps to cultivate a refined sense of humor (it will be difficult to make the disciples of Charlie Chaplin sensitive to the gentle touch of Sarah Orne Jewett, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, or Mark Twain) or a nature poem or story that opens hitherto unseeing eyes, are as valuable as any sermon ever preached. Anything that fosters flippancy, disobedience, or irreverence; that preaches the gospel of success through mere chance; that cultivates a coarse sense of humor; that emphasizes materialism; that admits that might makes right, or that the end justifies the means; or an exclusive diet of stories in which everything comes out all right in the end,—these are most emphatically unsound from a moral standpoint, because they are either pernicious to high ideals or untrue to life.

I have said that our success depends upon our earnestness, enthusiasm, and untiring efforts. One who does not take her work seriously will not take the time and trouble to plan

out a course for her particular group, but will probably be governed by any text books that may be allotted to her, or unquestioningly follow the traditions.

By their notebooks ye shall know them. If they have none? They probably had no plans. If they have beautifully arranged and carefully written ones dated six years back? They were alive once, but have since become "dry as dust." If their plans are scratched out and added to; if they contain notes scrawled in the margin; if they aren't kept in books at all but perhaps on loose leaves or cards? Such teachers are alive, at any rate; they are not so wedded to their plans that they cannot change them. I find that the chief value in plans lies in the numerous changes they suggest when I come to use them.

A teacher of literature must have ability for indefatigable labor. Selecting material for class study is the smallest part of the work; there remains planning to the minutest detail for the presentation. This means careful study, originating innumerable devices to secure variety and to arouse interest, visits to the library for research work, sending for pictures and other illustrative material. Then there is the list of outside reading to be made out. This does not mean going through a printed list and selecting a book here and there, but actually reviewing the books or getting authentic first-hand information about them. A person who is able and willing to do all this has a fighting chance of selecting something worth while for her class and of being a successful teacher of literature.

The following is an example of the work that might be carried on in Grade Seven, or the first class of the Junior High School. It is purposely difficult, but not beyond the comprehension of the children. Probably all the selections might be suitable for an eighth grade; none of them are simple enough to be used lower than Grade Seven, and could not be given there for independent study. This, however, is what we should strive for in selecting material for any grade. If there are no problems that require real work in solving, the children become restless and lose interest; it is better to be like Kate Douglas Wiggin's minister friend who said, in speaking of his sermons to his uneducated flock, "Generally I try to keep within their reach, but once in a while I throw the fodder so high that they have to stretch their necks to catch any of it." This stretching process will be a pleasure to our boys and girls, who enjoy chinning the bar physically

and mentally, provided we give them the proper training. I shall speak later of the method of study and the kind of assignment necessary to make this work interesting. I am grouping the selections by months, not only to indicate the length of time to be devoted to each selection but because the time is significant. All, or practically all the material is contained in three books. If it is impossible to get all three books of every class, we can get one set of each and sacrifice the time order, by having the sections studying different books at one time.

OUTLINE FOR GRADE VII

Selections for Study

September and October

Poem to be memorized.

"To the Fringed Gentian," by William Cullen Bryant.

Book for Study.

"Atlantic Prose and Poetry." Edited by Charles Swain
Thomas and Harry G. Paul.

November

Long poem for detailed Study.

"The Courtship of Miles Standish," by Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow.

Memorize selection from poem.....Elson Reader, Book III.

December

Dickens' "Christmas Carol" (abridged) Elson Reader, Book III.
Poem for memorization.

"The Elixir" or "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by
Night."

January and February

"The Man Without a Country," by Edward Everett Hale.

Memory selections.

Philip Nolan's Speech (from "The Man Without a Country").

"Breathes There the Man" (from the "Lay of the Last
Minstrel").

March and April

King Arthur Stories (Mallory version) Elson Reader, Book III.
Introduction ("The Age of Chivalry").

"The Coming of Arthur."

Supplemented by a selection from Tennyson's "Coming of
Arthur."

"The Story of Gareth."

"The Peerless Knight Lancelot."

Supplemented by "The Death of Elaine" from Tennyson's
"Lancelot and Elaine."

"The Search for the Holy Grail."

Supplemented by Tennyson's "Sir Galahad" (Three stanzas
memorized).

"The Passing of Arthur."

Supplemented by selection from Tennyson's "Passing of Arthur."

"More things are wrought by prayer"—memorized.

May and June

Group of short nature poems.

"Forbearance," Emerson (memorized).

"To the Dandelion," Lowell.

"The Spacious Firmament on High," Addison (memorized).

"To a Skylark," Wordsworth (memorized).

This outline shows a variety of authors, and a variety in the types of literature. Each selection is of recognized literary worth; there is no question of the moral standard; and the child's interests in human nature, in adventure and heroism, in the marvelous, and in nature are satisfied. Besides the long selections, it will be noted that there is a collection of short stories and poems. I believe that it is well to begin the year's work with such a collection. We can more easily establish our working standards with short units than with long ones. The approach to the story, the study of it, and the summary are repeated frequently, so that, when the children meet the longer pieces, they are not discouraged. Then too, there is a sufficient variety to appeal to all, whereas if we begin with a long selection and a few (or even one) do not like it, they lose interest in the work. If a child's interest is once aroused, he approaches the next work with an open mind, is prepared to like it, and generally succeeds. It is a rare child who will not find something he likes in *Atlantic Prose and Poetry*, for it contains the lyric and the ballad, humor and pathos, stories of human life, animals, and the elements of nature.

In the eighth grade *Selected Stories* by Sarah Orne Jewett might alternate with *Modern Verse* by Anita Forbes as successor to *Atlantic Prose and Poetry*, and in the ninth year *Short Stories* in the Riverside Literary Series might start the work with a technical study of the short story.

OUTSIDE READING

Grade Seven

Minimum Requirement.

One book from the following list is to be read and reported upon each month.

Group I

Biographies.

Two books from this list are required.

"The Story of My Life," Helen Keller.

- "Lives of Girls Who Became Famous," Bolton.
 "The Story of Joan of Arc," Andrew Lang.
 "Boy's Life of Abraham Lincoln," Nicolay.
 "God's Troubador," Sophie Jewett.
 "Boys Who Became Famous Men," Skinner.
 "Deeds of Daring Done by Girls," N. H. Moore.
 * "The Americanization of Edward Bok," Edward Bok.
 "Abraham Lincoln," James Baldwin.
 "American Hero Stories," Eva M. Tappan.
 "Boy's and Girl's Plutarch," Edited by J. S. White.
 "Boys' Book of Heroes," Edward Everett Hale.
 "Daniel Boone," J. S. C. Abbott.
 "Four Great Americans," James Baldwin.
 "Heroes Every Child Should Know," H. W. Mabie.
 * "Up from Slavery," Booker Washington.
 "Theodore Roosevelt, the Boy and the Man," James Morgan
 "Boy's Life of Theodore Roosevelt," H. Hagedorn.
 * "Theodore Roosevelt" (not the exact name of the book),
 Jacob Riis.
 * "The Making of an American," Jacob Riis.
 * "Life of Lord Nelson," Southey.

*For advanced pupils.

Group II.

Stories of the Outdoor World (nature and animals).

Two books from this list are required.

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| "Lobo, Rag, and Vixen," | Seton-Thompson. |
| "Lives of the Hunted," | " " |
| "The Biography of a Grizzly," | " " |
| "Wild Animals I Have Known," | " " |
| "Bird Life," | Pearson. |
| "Black Beauty," | Sewell. |
| "Nights With Uncle Remus," | Harris. |
| "Out-of-Door Book," | E. M. Tappan. |
| "Red Book of Animals," | Andrew Lang. |
| "Spring," | Dallas Lore Sharp. |
| "Summer," | " " |
| "The Fall of the Year," | " " |
| "Winter," | " " |
| "Wake—Robin," | Burroughs. |
| "Secrets of the Woods," | W. J. Long. |
| "Stars in Song and Legend," | John G. Porter. |
| "Stories of Insect Life," | C. M. Weed. |
| "Bob, Son of Battle," | Ollivant. |
| "The Story of Matka, a Tale of Mist Island," | D. S. Jordan. |
| "The First Jungle Book," | Kipling. |
| "Rab and His Friends," | Brown. |

Group III.

Stories about people.

Four books from this list are required.

- "The Perfect Tribute," Andrews.
 "Master Skylark," Bennett.
 "Pilgrim's Progress," Bunyan.

- "Robinson Crusoe," Defoe.
 "Merrylips," Dix.
 "The Hoosier Schoolboy," Eggleston.
 "Tom Brown's School Days," Hughes.
 "Betty Leicester," S. O. Jewett.
 "Betty Leicester's Christmas," S. O. Jewett.
 "Feats on the Fjord," Martineau.
 "A Dog of Flanders," Ouida.
 "The Nurnberg Stove," "
 "The Prince and the Pauper," Mark Twain.
 "Tom Sawyer," "
 "Heidi," Spyri.
 "Barnaby Lee," Bennett.
 "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," Wiggin.
 "Swiss Family Robinson," Wyss.
 "Captain January," Richards.
 "Bird's Christmas Carol," Wiggin.
 "Captains Courageous," Kipling.
 "A New England Boyhood," E. E. Hale.
 "The William Henry Letters," Diaz.
 "Anne's Terrible Good Nature," E. V. Lucas.
 "Cast Away in the Cold," Hayes.
 "Treasure Island," Stevenson.
 "Adrift on an Ice Pan," Grenfell.
 "Little Women," Alcott.
 "Little Men," "
 "Peter and Wendy," Barrie.
 "Hans Brinker," Dodge.
 "Polly Oliver's Problem," Wiggin.
 "Jackanapes," Ewing.
 "Slow Coach," E. V. Lucas.
 "Being a Boy," Warner.
 "Tom Paulding," Brander Matthews.
 "The Story of Roland," James Baldwin.
 "The Peterkin Papers," Lucretia Hale.

Group IV.

Poems.

Two reports on poems read outside of class are required. Each report must include at least six poems taken from any of the following books:

- Longfellow's Poems—"Poems Every Child Should Know," Burt.
 Whittier's Poems—"Golden Numbers," Wiggin and Smith.
 Bryant's Poems—"The Land of Song," Shute.
 Holmes' Poems—"One Hundred Narrative Poems," Teter.
 Lowell's Poems—"Modern Verse," Forbes.
 Tennyson's Poems—"The Golden Treasury," Palgrave.
 Emerson's Poems—"The Silver Treasury," Brackett.
 Wordsworth's Poems—"The Golden Staircase," Chisholm.
 Eugene Field's Poems—"Book of Famous Verse," Replier.
 A Child's Garden of Verse, Stevenson—"The Listening Child,"
 Celia Thatcher.

The final step which makes or mars a course in literature is the conduct of the work. There are three phases of the

work that require attention:—the approach, the method of conducting recitations, and the assignment of home work. In all three we must strive for variety and ingenuity and must avoid letting the work lag; otherwise the spell is broken and the children lose interest.

The approach differs, of course, with the selection to be studied, but it should always arouse interest and curiosity and present as much concrete illustration as possible. For example: Before beginning the "Courtship of Miles Standish," the teacher should get the historical background by studying the story of the Plymouth Colony. The children know the main facts from their history work, but these are enlivened by assigning chapters from "Mary of Plymouth," by Otis, to several children. I have ten copies of this book, which I give to ten children; I divide the chapters among them and let them report their information to the class. Since the story, supposedly told by a sixteen-year-old girl, gives the details of the family life, the dress, the habits, and the circumstances of the times, and since it contains many excellent illustrations, it proves to be a great stimulus to the study of the poem, and helps the children to understand the situations and to visualize easily.

In approaching the *Christmas Carol*, for which a preliminary reading may be assigned, we might show illustrations of the story, let the pupils examine them carefully, and jot down a few notes about each one.

- Example:—Picture 1. Man and some boys sliding down an ice slide.
Picture 2. Man with little lame boy on his shoulder.
Picture 3. Some people at a dinner table. A lady bringing in a pudding.
Picture 4. A boy crying in a school room. Some figures like ghosts in picture.
Picture 5. A man sitting up in bed, looking at a ghost, etc.

The children will read the story and be prepared the next day to arrange the pictures in their logical order and tell the incidents illustrated. If one cannot get pictures, one may put notes like the above on the blackboard. They suggest pictures, and the children, after reading the story, readily visualize them.

In preparation for Tennyson's *Sir Galahad*, the children should know the story of the *Search for the Holy Grail*, and those of us who live in the vicinity of Boston may make an

interesting approach through the Abbey paintings in the Boston Public Library.

We may arouse interest in a bird or a flower poem by directing the children's attention to other poems of that type. For example, when we study Wordsworth's *To a Skylark*, we might suggest, a week before, that the pupils look up bird poems. On the day appointed they come with their data. They know the birds most frequently immortalized in verse; they know the names of some poets who have written about birds; they know the qualities in the birds which call forth the poets' praise; and they are able in discussing *To a Skylark* to make interesting comparisons.

How shall we make the assignment interesting? Again the answer is variety and ingenuity. In speaking of approach I have suggested two assignments, the individual research and special topic. There are numerous others. Paraphrasing poems is interesting and revealing. It can be done best with poems such as *The Sailing of King Olaf*, *Alec Yeaton's Son*, and *The Romance of a Rose* from "Atlantic Prose and Poetry" and with the Parts of the *Courtship of Miles Standish*. Reading to find the central thought and expressing it in one sentence can be done with skill and accuracy by the seventh grade children after some practice. The children enjoy making test questions for their classmates. This exercise is especially well done when there is competition, and the best set of questions is given to the class under the direction of the one who formulated them. Preparing an adequate glossary for a given selection gives a new lease of life to vocabulary work, while writing a blurb or a news item for a story robs summaries and character sketches of their horrors. Last year we had an interesting hall exercise as a result of an assignment in *The Man Without a Country*. We had finished the story, and I wanted to summarize and emphasize the high lights. I told the pupils to imagine they were sailors or officers on one of the ships and to write home and tell one interesting incident about the strange prisoner on ship board. The result was the best reaction I ever got on a home assignment. They chose significant names for the ships, they thought the dates out carefully, they went to their geographies for latitude and longitude, their language savored of salt twang, and best of all, their facts were so accurate that the letters were read in the hall just as they were written.

In a long story or poem like the *Courtship of Miles Standish* or the *King Arthur Group* there is grave danger of

monotony unless we make a special effort to vary our assignment, and we should endeavor to treat each section or part in a different way. One day we may have oral reading with questioning conducted by the readers. Another day, we may distribute numbered slips of paper, one to every pupil. Each paper contains a question, and the children rise in the order of their numbers, read their question, and answer it. One time the answers of these questions may outline the plot; another time they may deal with setting, character, or the opinions of the children. Again the pupils may be given a short answer test in order to reveal their understanding and memory of the story. This test takes but a few minutes, the papers are corrected immediately, and the correction usually starts a discussion which is more natural and lively than one we have to urge by pricking them with questions. A discussion of characters and motives is often stimulating. "What should you have done if you had been in John Alden's place?" as a rule arouses divers opinions; while a search for a particular kind of allusion or illustration is enthusiastically received by even the slower pupils. Keeping notebooks or making any kind of specimen adds interest to the work and affords tangible matter for reference and review. When these books can be illustrated by the children themselves, and I have had scores of pupils who did this, the work becomes doubly valuable. A class book may be made by selecting the best papers from every set of notes of written assignments, and by letting those who offer the best drawings make copies of them for the class book. Children seem to feel it no hardship to stay after school or to come in early for this kind of work. Dramatization is, of course, the most interesting and popular reaction, and probably no other kind is more valuable. Here we emphasize the plot, the character-study, the setting, the costuming, the manners and the customs of the times with thoroughness that would never be accomplished in an ordinary discussion. In the front of the classroom, with no scenery and no costumer's art, we can have the most picturesque scene and the most gorgeous costume, or the meanest hovel and poorest attire with the nonchalance of Cinderella's godmother. It needs only a touch of the imagination supported by a careful study of the story. The child's power of perception and judgment have no better training than in this kind of work.

There is one other type of work that I should like to mention as invaluable in developing love for poetry. If we find

the children of an especially prosaic cast of mind (and whether we do or not), we should do well to begin every literature lesson with the reading of a poem by some child who has chosen it independently. Very brief comments may follow it. The child may tell why he chose it, or he may call the attention of his classmates to some point that interested him, or he may ask a question about it, or answer one that a pupil or the teacher may ask. If a teacher keeps *Golden Numbers*, *The Land of Song*, *The Golden Treasury*, *Modern Verse*, and *One Hundred Narrative Poems* on her desk, she will have a well from which any child may drink, and she herself will feel equipped for any emergency.

If we possess a genuine love for literature, and if we realize how much the lack of it will prevent our pupils from getting wholesome recreation and deep-rooted happiness of which no misfortune can rob them, we shall not fail in selecting what is good, and true, and beautiful and in presenting it to the pupils as such. As Mr. Hitchcock says in concluding *How to English the Young*, "Teaching literature, indeed all kinds of teaching, is but a means to an end. Let your method be what you will, but ever keep that end in view."

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